

Free legal assistance for the poor offered at clinics across state

June 15, 2015

A dozen legal clinics are scheduled across the state this summer to help poor people address issues such as birth certificate corrections, child support, uncontested divorce, foreclosure prevention, guardianships, Social Security issues and wills.

Family law clinics addressing divorce, child support, guardianship, emancipation and name change are scheduled in Hernando, Tupelo, Fulton and Corinth. People interested in seeking assistance must register in advance by calling the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project at 601-960-9577. The schedule is:

- June 16, 4-8 p.m., DeSoto County Courthouse, Hernando;
- July 29, 4-7 p.m., Itawamba County Courthouse, Fulton;
- Aug. 13, 4-7 p.m., Alcorn County Courthouse, Corinth.

The family law clinics are a cooperative effort of MVLP, local bar associations, Young Lawyers associations and the *Pro Bono* Initiative of the University of Mississippi School of Law.

Assistance with birth certificate corrections, Social Security issues and will preparation will be available at free legal clinics in Hazlehurst, Meadville and Macon. The Mississippi Center for Legal Services will provide the free legal assistance to low income people whose annual income is at or less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. To learn more, call Tamara Toles at 601-545-2950 extension 2614, or e-mail ttoles@mslegalservices.org. The schedule is:

- June 22, 1 p.m., Copiah County Library, Hazlehurst;
- June 25, 10 a.m., Franklin County Library, Meadville;
- July 20, 10 a.m., Noxubee County Library, Macon.

Guardianship clinics focused on assisting grandparents and others in enrolling children in school are scheduled for Vicksburg, Jackson and Tupelo. The schedule is:

- June 24, 2-5 p.m., Vicksburg-Warren County Library, Vicksburg;
- July 1, 3-6 p.m., Richard Wright Library, Jackson;
- July 15, 1-4 p.m., Lee County Justice Center, Tupelo.

Schools require documentation of legal guardianship before enrolling a child living with someone other than a parent. Grandparents and other relatives must have guardianship documents filed in Chancery Court. People needing assistance in establishing guardianships must make an appointment by calling the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project at 601-960-9577.

Foreclosure prevention is among numerous initiatives of the Mississippi Center for Justice. Free foreclosure prevention clinics are scheduled for the Gulf Coast and Cleveland. For more information, call MCJ at 601-352-2269. The schedule is:

- June 22, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Hancock County Library, Bay St. Louis;
- June 22, 4-6 p.m., West Biloxi Public Library, Biloxi;
- June 23, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Long Beach Public Library, Long Beach;
- June 24, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Center for Community and Economic Development, 1417 College Street, Cleveland. The clinic in Cleveland will also provide assistance on fair housing issues and expungement.

Mississippi Supreme Court Presiding Justice Jess H. Dickinson, a member of the state Access to Justice Commission, said, "I am very pleased with the hard work so many are doing to provide clinics to the rural, unserved areas of our state. But the under-funding of our Legal Services offices has grown to the point that we are reaching far less than fifty percent of the need. That means thousands of Mississippians – including many who are elderly, uneducated, veterans, children, and single mothers – are unrepresented in our courts, simply because they are poor. And while these wonderful clinics will provide some help, the overwhelming need will be met only with a massive increase in funding, or by increasing the pro bono hours donated by our already overworked pro bono lawyers. This huge denial of equal access to our courts should be of concern to every fair-minded Mississippian."

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